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19

YEAR 1189 A. D.

Ordinances Concerning Building.¹

The documents quoted below give good evidence of the style in which the better class of houses was built during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The greater part of the city was built of wood, the houses being roofed with straw, reeds, and similar materials. The frequent fire which took place owing to this manner of building, especially the great fire of 1135 which destroyed a great part of the City, compelled the citizens to take some precautions against the recurrence of such a calamity. Stone was used to a larger extent, and various privileges were conceded to those who used stone in the construction of their houses. This material was made compulsory in the party-walls, but the rest of the buildings might be made of anything, and usually constructed of wood. The regulations of 1189 did not produce any great or immediate effect on the style of building, and a further ordinance was issued in 1212, after a disastrous fire had destroyed London Bridge and a large number of houses.

Source. — The London Assizes of 1189 and 1212, quoted in Hudson Turner's *History of Domestic Architecture*.

(b In the year of our Lord 1189, in the first year of the reign of the illustrious King Richard, in the mayoralty of Henry Fitz-Aylwin, who was the first Mayor of London, these provisions and ordinances were made by the wise men of the City, for appeasing the contentions which sometimes arise among neighbours touching boundaries made or to be made between their lands, so that such disputes might be settled according to that which was then provided and ordained. And the said provisions and ordinance was called an Assize.

When two neighbours shall have agreed to build between themselves a wall of stone, each shall give a foot and a half of land, and so they shall construct, at their joint cost, a stone wall three feet thick and sixteen feet in height. And, if they agree, they shall make a gutter between them to

carry off the water from their houses, as they may deem most convenient. But if they should not agree, either of them may make a gutter to carry the water dripping from his house on to his own land, except he can convey it into the high street.

They may also, if they agree, raise the said wall as high as they please, at their joint expense; and if it shall happen that one shall wish to raise the wall, and the other not, it shall be lawful for him who is willing, to raise his own part as much as he please, and build upon it, without damage of the other, at his own cost.

And if any one shall build his own stone wall, upon his own land, of the height of sixteen feet, his neighbour ought to make a gutter under the eaves of the house which is placed on that wall, and receive in it the water falling from that house, and lead it on his own land, unless he can lead it into the high street.

And if any one shall have windows looking towards the land of a neighbour, and although he and his predecessors have long been possessed of the view of the aforesaid windows, nevertheless his neighbour may lawfully obstruct the view of those windows, by building opposite to the, on his own ground, as he shall consider most expedient; except he who hath the windows can shew any writing whereby his neighbour may not obstruct the view of those windows.

Let it be borne in mind that in former times a great part of the city was built of wood, and the houses were roofed with straw, reeds and such things; so that when any house caught fire, a great part of the city was destroyed by that fire; as happened in the first year of the reign of King Stephen. For it is written in the chronicles that in a fire which began at London Bridge, St. Paul's Church was burnt down, and the fire proceeded thence, burning all the houses and buildings as far as St. Clement Danes. Therefore many citizens, to avoid such danger, built according to their means, on their ground, a stone house covered and protected by thick tiles against the fury of fire, whereby it often happened that when a fire arose in the city and burnt many edifices, and had reached such a house, not being able to injure it, it became extinguished, so that many neighbours' houses were wholly saved from fire by that house.

(b) A decree made by the counsel of the citizens, for the setting into order of the city and to provide, by God's help, against fire.

First, they advise that all ale-houses be forbidden, except those which shall be licensed by the common council of the city at Guildhall, excepting those belonging to persons willing to build of stone, that the city may be secure. And that no baker bake, or ale-wife brew, by night, either with reeds or straw or stubble, but with wood only.

They advise also that all the cook-shops on the Thames be whitewashed and plastered within and without, and that all inner chambers and hostelryes be wholly removed, so that there remain only the house (hall) and bed-room,

Whosoever wishes to build, let him take care, as he loveth himself and his goods, that he roof not with reed, nor rush, nor with any manner of litter, but with tile only, or shingle, or boards, or, if it may be, with lead, within the city and Port-soken. Also all houses which till now are covered

with reed or rush, which can be plastered, let them be plastered within eight days, and let those which shall not be so plastered within the term be demolished by the aldermen and lawful men of the venue.

All wooden houses which are nearest to the stone houses in Cheap, whereby the stone houses in Cheap may be in peril, shall be securely amended by view of the mayor and sheriffs, and good men of the city, or, without exception, to whomsoever they may belong, pulled down.

The watches, and they who watch by night for the custody of the city shall go out by day and return by day, or they by whom they may have been sent forth shall be fined forty shillings by the city. And let old houses in which brewing or baking is done be whitewashed and plastered within and without, that they may be safe against fire.

Let all the aldermen have a proper hood and cord, and let him who shall not have one within the appointed term be amerced by the city. Foreign workmen who come into the city, and refuse to obey the aforesaid decree, shall be arrested until brought before the mayor and good men to hear their judgment. They say also that it is only proper that before every house there should be a tub full of water, either of wood or stone.